

FY 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



WORCESTER
PUBLIC LIBRARY
FOUNDATION



A Message from Our Board President



As we mark the Worcester Public Library Foundation's 22nd year of supporting the Worcester Public Library, I am both honored and inspired by the progress we have made together. This year has been a testament to the strength of our community's dedication to enhancing the vital role our public library plays in Worcester.

First and foremost, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Executive Director Jason Homer and the entire Worcester Public Library team. Your leadership and commitment continue to drive the library's success. I also extend heartfelt thanks to the WPL Board of Directors, the Friends of WPL, and the City of Worcester for your ongoing support and partnership.

As my tenure as President comes to an end, it is my honor and pleasure to share with you, for the final time, this brief note on the Foundation's recent efforts to advance the library.

This past year has been particularly exciting for the Worcester Public Library. We were thrilled to see WPL become a finalist for the prestigious IMLS National Medal for Museum and Library Services, a remarkable recognition of our library's excellence and impact on the community. This highest honor conferred on museums and libraries reflects the dedication of everyone involved in making WPL a beacon of knowledge and inspiration. In addition to this significant achievement, we were proud of the national and internationally recognized "March Meowness" fee forgiveness initiative, which successfully reduced barriers to library access for many of our patrons. This program exemplifies WPL's commitment to ensuring that the library remains accessible to all members of our community, regardless of financial constraints. I am also excited to see the result of our ongoing collaboration with the Downtown Worcester BID to create a community inspired "You Belong Here!" art and lighting installation.

I am pleased to report that the Foundation has raised over \$350,000 this year for the benefit of the Worcester Public Library. This support underscores the community's belief in the importance of our library. Every contribution - whether financial, through volunteerism, or expertise - plays a crucial role in helping us advance the library's mission and enhance its services.

Looking ahead, our commitment to supporting the Worcester Public Library remains unwavering. We invite everyone to join us in this journey, as we work together to ensure that the library continues to thrive and serve as a dynamic resource for all.

On behalf of the Foundation's Board of Trustees, Corporators, and staff, I extend our profound gratitude to the many individuals, foundations, and organizations whose generosity makes our work possible. Your support is reflected in the successes highlighted in this report and in the continued vitality of our beloved library.

Here's to another year of growth, achievement, and community engagement.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Matthew C. Irish". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Matthew C. Irish
President

Worcester Public Library Foundation

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Mission

Our mission is to enhance the visibility of the Worcester Public Library, and to raise public and private funds to ensure its continued vitality.

The Vital Role of WPL's Adult Services Department

Public libraries continue to be indispensable hubs of knowledge and community engagement. Central to this mission is the Worcester Public Library's Adult Services Department, which serves a diverse range of needs and interests for adult patrons. Adult Services, which is comprised of 15 staff members, plays a crucial role in providing a wide array of programs and educational opportunities tailored to adult learners. From computer literacy workshops and financial planning seminars, to wellness activities and book discussion groups, these programs cater to various interests and skill levels.

Beyond individual enrichment, WPL serves as a community gathering space where people can connect and engage with one another. The Adult Services Department organizes many events that foster social interaction. You may find patrons doing a community puzzle, meeting therapy dogs, learning to cook Vietnamese cuisine, or playing chess. These activities provide opportunities for the community to engage with local culture, discuss important issues, and build relationships with their neighbors.

WPL is a treasure trove of information, and the Adult Services Department ensures that patrons can navigate and utilize these resources effectively. This includes maintaining a robust collection of books, periodicals, and digital materials, as well as providing access to databases, online journals, and research tools. Librarians are trained to assist with job searches, technology assistance, digital literacy, and research inquiries - whether patrons are seeking historical data, academic information, or practical advice. Their expertise can help budding entrepreneurs as they explore starting their own business, or job seekers as they need assistance with resume writing. This unassuming department helps bridge the gap between the overwhelming volume of available information and the specific needs of individuals.

The Adult Services Department is far more than a repository for books; it is a vibrant, dynamic entity that plays a crucial role in the intellectual, social, and personal development of adult patrons. By offering diverse programming, resources, and support, this department helps individuals grow, connect, and thrive. As the needs of society continue to evolve, the staff remain steadfast in their commitment to serving all members of the community, proving that their value extends far beyond their traditional role as purveyors of books.



“March Meowness” Craze Leads to Thousands of Forgiven Fees

The Worcester Public Library became quite famous this past March in the national and international news with our fun initiative “March Meowness,” which forgave patron’s library fees from lost or damaged items in exchange for showing a picture of a cat. The Library received over 10,000 pictures of cats from all around the globe in support of this initiative! Thanks to these feline ambassadors, the library was able to reinstate 4,717 patron accounts! News of this fun initiative to eliminate barriers spread from Worcester, Massachusetts to all over the world!



“You Belong Here!”



We continue to partner with the Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District to bring a permanent large scale public art and lighting installation to the Salem Street side of the WPL façade. The “You Belong Here!” project started through a collaboration with facilitator Creative Hub Worcester, and artist Sharinna Travieso, in order to get community input on the meaning of “belonging.” The result - a one of a kind mural by artist Travieso which reflects this theme of “belonging” - will be installed this fall!



Additional support for this project was provided by the Commonwealth Places Program created by MassDevelopment, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, and Worcester Cultural Coalition.

WPL Honored for Great Work



The Worcester Public Library was bestowed the honor of being selected as a finalist for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service by the Institute of Museum and Library Services! This is the nation's highest honor conferred on museums and libraries for service to the community. WPL was one of only 15 libraries chosen from across the nation. The library celebrated with a surprise party for our community. While the end result of the contest wasn't what we had hoped for, being named a finalist is a huge accomplishment for our library, playing a significant role in bringing attention across the country to the great work WPL does in our community.



“Dog Days of Summer Reading”



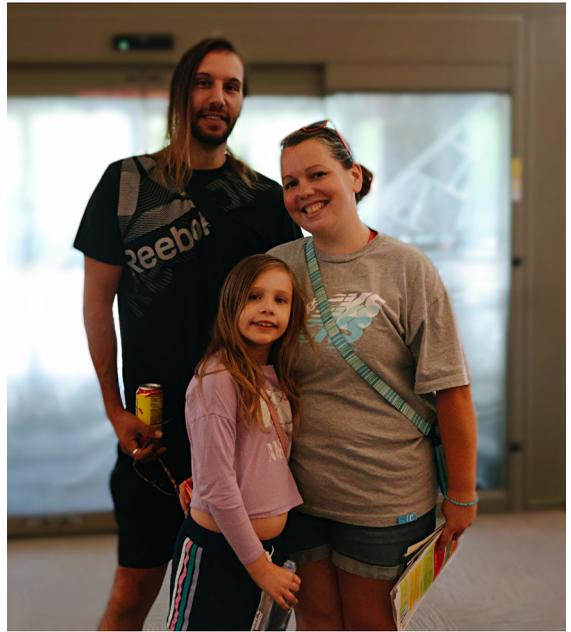
After the overwhelming cat-craziness of WPL’s “March Meowness” initiative, dog lovers wanted their due, and so the Summer Reading theme for 2024 was born: “Dog Days of Summer Reading.” New and current Worcester Public Library cardholders had access to limited edition Snoopy library cards in honor of this year’s theme.

Throughout the summer, patrons enjoyed dog-themed literacy programs and events to encourage reading in order to curtail the summer set-back months. Creating dog key chains; Bluey & Bingo parties; and the De-stress with Dogs program, where patrons could interact with registered therapy dogs from Tufts Paws for People; were a few of the popular activities. Our patrons were also able to choose a therapy dog to write to through the Paws Pen Pal Program, and each participant received a personalized response. A remarkable 147 letters were sent from loveable dogs through this pen pal program!

Summer Reading ended with WPL’s fourth annual Block Party on a beautiful day in August with free fun activities and entertainment. Attendees of all ages enjoyed bounce houses, character visits, a book sale, food trucks, vendor tables, and much more!



“I have thanked multiple staff members for this summer adult reading program, and I truly mean it. This program helped me get through a tough book and I thank WPL greatly.” - WPL Patron



Thanks to our generous sponsors for supporting the Summer Reading program: bankHometown, Bob's Discount Furniture, Cornerstone Bank, Country Bank, Mattina R. Proctor Foundation, Price Chopper's Golub Foundation, UniBank, Walmart, and Friends of the Worcester Public Library.

Lilly Turns 10!

On January 8th we celebrated Lilly Mobile Library's 10th birthday with cupcakes, giveaways and arts and crafts for kids! Lilly was "born" thanks to support from the United Way of Central Massachusetts, Quinsigamond Community College, the QCC Foundation, Worcester State University, and the City of Worcester.

Lilly and her older sibling, Libby, are very busy! Together, they visit 32 Worcester Public Elementary Schools, six middle schools, seven preschool/ Head Start programs and six after-school programs every four weeks! Many thanks to the City of Worcester and the College of the Holy Cross for their continued generous annual support of Libby.



Celebrate Our Library!



On November 9th, library supporters gathered at WPL's Main Branch for our yearly Celebrate Our Library! fundraising event. The first floor of the library, which welcomes hundreds of patrons daily, was transformed into an elegant setting for this fun night.

Authors Kristan Higgins, Kirthana Ramiseti, and John Searles joined in lively conversation with moderator Stephanie Pasha, President of the WPL Board of Directors, who made interviewing these three award-winning authors look easy! Special guest speaker, Julie, mom to Joey, a sixth-grade student at Roosevelt Elementary, made us laugh and cry, as she shared the impact that the Roosevelt Branch library has had on her son. Joey, who utilizes a wheelchair for his mobility, loves visiting this special school-based branch. While Joey has spent much of his life visiting doctors, enduring therapy sessions, surgeries and recoveries, Julie painted a picture of the joy the library brings to her son, as it exposes him to a life without roadblocks. With a book always in his hands, Joey is up for any program the library offers, or meeting up and hanging out with friends.

"I do know that while sometimes it is tricky to bring Joey out and around the world to learn, grow, and play, we can always bring the world to him within the walls and pages in the library." - Julie

After feeling the impact these neighborhood libraries have in our community, auctioneer Che Anderson helped raise funds to benefit the four *One City, One Library* Branches, including Joey's favorite, the Roosevelt Branch!



Thank you to our event sponsors for making this evening such a success: Bartholomew & Company, Inc., Bay State Savings Bank, Coghlin Electrical Contractors, Inc., College of the Holy Cross, Consigli Construction Co., Inc., Fidelity Bank, Fontaine Community Foundation, The Kirby Foundation, Markos Jewelers, M & T Bank, National Grid, Reliant Medical Group, RE/MAX Vision, Saint-Gobain, UMASS Memorial Health, UniBank, Webster Five Foundation, Wegmans, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.



Annual Meeting

Library friends and supporters gathered at the Foundation's Annual Meeting on September 14th to vote in new Board Trustees and thank the outgoing members. The evening included the presentation of the Dr. Richard E. Greene Founders Award to library advocate Senate President Emerita Harriette L. Chandler, and the Dr. William F. and Betty O'Neil Service Award to longtime WPL Friend Christine Weinrobe. Dr. Richard E. Greene was honored with the title of WPLF Corporator Emeritus, and his son, Richard, was present to accept the recognition on his behalf. Guest speaker Massachusetts Senator Julian Cyr discussed his important work protecting public libraries and librarians from efforts to limit free speech and ban access to books and materials.



Mini Golf Fun for All Ages



We were excited to bring mini golf back inside the library for our third annual Tee Off for WPL! fundraiser. Our generous sponsors were called on to decorate their holes creatively and they did not disappoint!

This two-day event started on Friday with our adults-only Mini Golf After Dark, which featured a variety of delicious food from the Worcester Regional Food Hub. Redemption Rock Brewery and Decanted Wine Trucks were also on hand to serve up festive drinks. The crowd had a blast mini golfing and rocking to popular Worcester-based musician Giuliano!





Saturday's Family Fun Day welcomed patrons of all ages to enjoy the course, while also having an opportunity to peruse the library and take advantage of its daily offerings.

Attendees were able to vote for the best decorated mini golf hole and crowned Lucky Dog Home Improvement the winner! The winning hole, featuring pictures of adoptable dogs from the Worcester Animal Rescue League, was inspired by Lucky Dog's own adopted dog from WARL! The winner's trophy, created in our own Fletcher Family Innovation Center, was presented to owners Don and Susan Elbag and their lucky pup River!



Thank you to our hole sponsors: AllCom Credit Union, Bay State Savings Bank, Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, Coney Island Hot Dogs, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, LEI Corporation, Lucky Dog Home Improvement, Margaret Boatwright-McEvoy, O'Neill & Associates, Perrone Landscaping, Quinsigamond Community College, RE/MAX Vision, Sullivan Group, UMass Chan Medical School, UniBank, The WooSox Foundation, Worcester Business Center/Mercantile Center, and Robert & Lynda Sorrenti. An extra special thank you to our Title Sponsor **Berkshire Bank** and Presenting Sponsor **Middlesex Savings Bank!**

Fun Festivities at Block Party



WPL hosted its fourth annual Community Block Party with free entertainment, activities, and giveaways. Food trucks and over 60 vendors kept thousands of visitors busy on a beautiful August day!

This event also highlights WPL's role as a cultural and educational leader in Worcester. By offering free, accessible programming that appeals to a wide range of interests and ages, the library is fostering a vibrant community spirit, encouraging lifelong learning, and furthering equity.



Message from WPL Executive Director Jason Homer

As we reflect on the past year at the Worcester Public Library, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the progress we have made together. Last year, we shared the work we had done to address the challenges facing our community, and this year, we have begun to see the dividends from those human investments. The newly formed Community Resources Department, which was established to better serve our community's most vulnerable populations, has not only enhanced our public service, but also helped us secure a position as a finalist for the prestigious IMLS National Library Medal. This recognition is a testament to the dedication and passion of our staff, and now, all WPL departments are working at full speed to deliver meaningful change to Worcester.

Ms. Frizzle, the beloved teacher from *The Magic School Bus* series, always encouraged her students to "Take chances, make mistakes, get messy!" We have embraced this motto as we strive to create real and lasting change. The bold steps we've taken, supported by the unwavering partnership of the Worcester Public Library Foundation, have been key to our success. It all began with a willingness to take a chance, and the results speak for themselves.

Our renovation of the Pappas Children's Center has been a highlight of the past few years – but we didn't stop there. Thanks to the generosity of the Foundation, we were able to acquire a state-of-the-art piece of technology called the Draw Alive. This innovative attraction allows children to color in different figures or animals, which are then scanned and added to a larger scene, bringing their artwork to life. It has been particularly heartwarming to see children of all ages engage with this new tool and get excited about the possibilities it offers.

As we mark the Worcester Public Library Foundation's 22nd year of supporting our library, I am inspired by the community's dedication to enhancing the crucial role WPL plays in Worcester. The Foundation's efforts have not only enabled us to continue our purpose, to nurture lifelong learning, cultivate knowledge, and champion intellectual freedom, but have also positioned WPL as the heart of the community – a role we embrace with pride.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Worcester Public Foundation, and its Trustees and Corporators, and to all of you – our patrons and supporters. Your belief in the importance of our library is what drives us forward, and together, we will continue to ensure that WPL remains a vibrant and accessible resource for all.

Sincerely,



Jason Homer
Executive Director
Worcester Public Library



New Logo, New Look!



WORCESTER
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After more than ten years of the old, WPL is slowly rolling out a fresh, new logo! This means the WPLF is also getting a fresh, updated look as depicted on the front of this report! Stay tuned for different versions of the logo over the coming months. The new logo was created by Travis Duda and his team at Hunchback Graphics.



WORCESTER
PUBLIC LIBRARY



Institutions Making an Impact

Many thanks to Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute for their ongoing voluntary payments to support the Worcester Public Library. This support is essential to enhancing the operations and services of WPL.

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